



Department of Justice

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Southern District of Mississippi**

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RIDGELAND ATTORNEY SENTENCED FOR DEFRAUDING HIS CLIENTS

Jackson, Miss – Vann F. Leonard, 46, an attorney from Ridgeland, Mississippi, was sentenced today to serve 41 months in federal prison followed by three years of supervised release for mail fraud and wire fraud, U.S. Attorney Gregory K. Davis, and FBI Special Agent in Charge Daniel McMullen announced. Leonard was also ordered to pay restitution in the amount of \$481,417.72. Leonard pled guilty to the charges on January 6, 2012. As part of his guilty plea, he agreed to forfeit approximately \$440,000.00 that he obtained as a result of his fraud. The court ordered today's sentence to run concurrently with Leonard's sentence for bankruptcy fraud imposed in 2011 in the United States District Court for the Northern District of Mississippi.

Leonard was a licensed attorney operating his law practice in Madison County, Mississippi, and elsewhere, who represented various clients in civil and criminal legal matters. He devised a scheme to defraud his clients by converting to his personal use the money they gave him for legal representation. During his guilty plea, Leonard admitted that he used the U.S. Mail and interstate wire communications in executing his scheme to defraud his clients. Specifically, he admitted that in June, 2008, he mailed a receipt to one of his clients falsely informing the client that he was holding the client's money in his trust account for use in civil litigation, but in fact, Leonard spent the money for his personal benefit. Leonard also admitted that in March, 2011, he requested an out of state client to wire money on at least two occasions for legal representation in criminal matters, but instead he spent the money for his personal benefit. As a result of these actions, the clients were lulled into a false sense of security regarding the disposition of their legal matters.

Leonard has been indicted on state criminal charges in Madison County and Rankin County for similar offenses.

The case was prosecuted by Assistant United States Attorney Carla J. Clark and the investigation was conducted by the Federal Bureau of Investigation.